

EMBODIED LIVES

*Reflections on the Influence of
Suprpto Suryodarmo and Amerta Movement*



Edited by: Katya Bloom, Margit Galanter and Sandra Reeve

EMBODIED LIVES

Reflections on the Influence of
Suprpto Suryodarmo and Amerta Movement

OPEN ACCESS

Chapter 1

Presence

Beate Stühm

Edited by:

Katya Bloom, Margit Galanter and Sandra Reeve

Taken from the book *Embodied Lives*,
published by:

Triarchy Press
Axminster
UK

info@triarchypress.net

www.triarchypress.net

First published in 2014.

Second edition published in 2025.

This chapter, including any images in it, is copyright © 2014 and 2025

Beate Stühm.

All rights reserved.

Paperback ISBN: 978-1-909470-32-3

This chapter is made available to readers as an open access file.

Other chapters are available as open access files from:
www.triarchypress.net/embodiedlivesopen

Buy the book in print and digital format here:
www.triarchypress.net/embodiedlives

A Balinese Saying

Ilmu Padi (a lesson from the rice plant)

semakin tua semakin berisi, dan semakin merunduk
(the older, the fuller, and the more it bows)



CONTENTS

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS	x
INTRODUCTION	1
1. PRESENCE	9
Beate Stühm (Germany)	
2. AMERTA MOVEMENT AND ARCHAEOLOGY	18
Keith Miller (UK)	
3. CULTURAL ASPECTS OF THE MOVEMENT WORK	28
Christina Stelzer (Germany)	
4. AMERTA AND TIBETAN BUDDHISM	35
Monika Förster (Germany/Holland)	
5. THE EYE OF THE HAND	43
Steve Hopkins (UK)	
6. A DOG PRACTICING ‘TALKING BODY’	55
José Mulder van de Graaf (Bolivia)	
7. “MAKE LESS THE HOPING”	64
Sandra Reeve (UK)	
8. TOUCHING FORGOTTEN REALITIES	72
Bettina Mainz (Germany)	
9. THE ECHO OF LIFE	83
Daniela Coronelli (Italy/UK)	
10. I ALWAYS DO THREE THINGS	92
Shantam Zohar (Israel)	

11. A PRESENCING DIAL	98
Margit Galanter (USA)	
12. AMERTA MOVEMENT AND SOMATICCOSTUME	108
Sally E. Dean (USA/UK)	
13. CRYSTALLIZATION-PERFORMANCE	122
Lise Lavelle (Denmark)	
14. BEING AND DOING IN THE WILD GARDEN	132
Susanne Tümpel (Germany)	
15. 'MANTRA GERAK' / MOVEMENT MANTRA	142
Agus Bima Prayitna (Indonesia)	
16. THE MUSICAL PORTAL	152
Tim Jones (UK)	
17. NEAR THE UNKNOWN	160
Franca Fubini (Italy)	
18. FAMILY	170
Una Nicholson (UK)	
19. THE INFANT'S LANGUAGE	179
Katya Bloom (USA/UK)	
20. "GOING OUT OF THE SITUATION" AND "STOP, DON'T FOLLOW THAT, WALK!"	189
Regula Nell (Switzerland)	
21. AMERTA MOVEMENT AND AUTISM	201
Sean Williams (UK)	

22. "FIND YOUR POSITION"	211
Susan Bauer (USA)	
23. "BODY BODY"	221
Helen Poynor (UK)	
24. EVER-SPEAKING BEING	231
Michael Dick (Germany)	
25. MOVING IN THE LAW	241
Simon Slidders (UK)	
26. THE BREATHING EYE	249
Andrea Morein (Germany)	
27. JOY	263
Anita Lüdke (Germany/Bolivia)	
28. "RE-MEMBERING" BUTTERFLY BEACH	276
Melinda Buckwalter (USA)	
29. I WILL TRACE THE CONSTELLATION OF MY STARS WITH MY FINGERS	283
Ellin Krinsly (USA/Australia/Mexico/Ethiopia)	
30. AWAKENING ART AND DHARMA NATURE TIME	295
Diane Butler (USA/Indonesia)	
AFTERWORD: A PRAPTO COMPANION	306

1. PRESENCE

Beate Stühm (Germany)

I am in a tropical paradise – unfortunately the mosquitoes are here too.

I feel a bit imprisoned. My choices are: being covered with 'off' repellent, covering up with clothes, being bitten or staying inside. "How to be happy in prison?" I hear Prapto speaking in my mind. Or, I think he said, "being confident in hell", but it is not really that bad.

I go inside – my head is busy, keep it simple, just walking is always a good start, walking and variations, running.

My intention: to get into my body and out of my head – this is my other prison.

This piece wants to be written and of course it should be the best, should be written with space and humour, profound, rich, light, poetic and with a sense of three-dimensional embodiment; all of this, and maybe more.

I walk, I run, head in front – yes – I enjoy this stupid run.

Head in front... it reminds me of my Self Portrait Dance 30 years ago at the San Francisco Dancers' Workshop. My head separate from my body, being in a box full of judgements. It was a great self-caricature, funny and sad. My head was making me feel crazy.

Stopping now in my movement, I see a bamboo stick, it looks friendly, I ...take it and move with it. Sounds come and – no – I do not follow this known melody, I am curious what evolves when I relax into listening while moving.

I come to sit on the cool grey floor, the bamboo in my hands, deep sounds arise from a deep place and an image from a movie comes – The Long Walk Home – the bamboo is brown, has segments and is warm in my hands. I look at my feet, the bamboo, my hands; I see my clothes and my position in the space and think "this would make a

great photo". I hear the birds, lean into my back and 'wait' for a new movement to come.

I 'wait', open, receiving the presence of life.

I hold the bamboo and the bamboo holds me; looking through the window, I remember the first feedback I got from Prapto, on my first visit to Java in 1987: "look near".

It was like zooming with my eyes from far to near, to myself. While zooming I became aware of the space and sensing the space made me breathe. I touched the way to be connected with space and, through the space, with the far and near.

I am here now, in my body, in the space with the bamboo and enjoy the colours, the movements of the leaves and the play of light and shadow, the birds singing.

Summertime and the living is easy.....I sing the few words I know.

Reflecting

The movement described above is a snapshot, an awareness practice, an 'improvisation' in Bolivia in December 2012.

It is filled with the atmosphere of this particular environment. However the essence of my movement practice and the witnessing of myself could happen anywhere.

I moved alone, but that is only true if I count only human beings. There were different sounds from insects and all kinds of animals, there was the atmosphere of my friend, who created this space, the hot air and who knows who else was also taking part, hiding in corners and holes. I was happy to share and be part of this living environment.

Entering the flow of a movement process is deeply satisfying, but it does not always happen.

Working in and with the 'here and now' is exciting for me.

I am curious about what the body offers, which movements come, which images or feelings arise, what will unfold. I am interested in what the body receives and in how it responds, in what it has to say, what knowledge it holds and when it gives it freely.

When I went inside (into the movement space) I had my intention: to get into my body. I was guided by my awareness and mindfulness.

I started from what I have, as Prapto used to say, which means with all my resources gathered in my life, including my familiar judge. I do not have to think any more what to do or how to start.

No preparation any more: every movement counts on the stage of life. Movement is not seen as a symbol nor is it seen as functional; it is not for getting better, it simply is.

Starting with walking felt good; it is so basic, my feet on the ground, taking a step, stamping in different directions, playing with balancing, falling on the feet, jumping, being creative, silly, all variations; it helps not to get stuck, not to become too serious or go too deep into a search for meaning. Being simple, just muscles, body and having fun and enjoying it.

Now I wonder how to bring the directness and aliveness of it *into writing*. How to write or speak not *about* the experience, but *from* it. Speaking 'about' often feels like drawing a veil over the experience, so we can control it; it creates distance, which sometimes is needed too. Finding the words, speaking from the experience, from being engaged and present with all the senses and feelings is so exciting, almost scary at times; it is real, alive and vibrant. Sometimes there are no words... maybe a poem, a sound, maybe only stillness.

Learning to trust my intuition and allowing for magical moments.

One needs the *Dreieinige Gehirn*, the Triune Brain, the interplay of all our brain areas, no hierarchy, a great field to be in; unfortunately the judge thinks he is the boss.

He comes in when my prefrontal cortex is stressed.

But the sanest and most subtle task of this prefrontal part of the brain is to give space for our listening to (sensing) the body and our feelings – and to be aware of it, reflect on it, understand its meaning.

An Experiment

Some time ago I was asked to offer a short walking experiment in a dance research group.

I had chosen an awareness experiment.

I asked the group members to lift one foot – noticing how they did it and whether they still had a sense of the ground – then to put that foot down – how did it arrive on the ground? I asked them to notice if they followed the foot with the whole body. Did they bring their whole being to the new place... maybe facing a different direction? Being in a new place means being closer or further away from, for example, walls, windows, the others. Did their eyes follow the movement? Or the movement follow their eyes? What did they see, and how did it feel? What did they sense?

Later I read my instructions as written down by a group member as she had heard them; she said: "...lifting the foot for the next step and putting it in a new place... how do the eyes react?"

"Interesting", I thought, "that task sounds and feels quite different". I sensed the speed in it, the forward orientation. The "for the next step" indicates for me the functional, the next and the new, the future. As if all is there, outside, in front. The action described is the same, but the attitude and process of awareness is very different.

Culturally, we in the West are very much forward oriented: the front is interesting and the future too. This became very clear to me after I had lived for some time in Java. I had noticed many times how much I was in front, in the future; I was already there. Food was already prepared, in my mind, while I was still ordering it; I was impatient.

In my movement practice as well as in Sumarah – a Javanese meditation, a path of awareness and acceptance (translated literally: giving up the fight, surrender) – the back is important, the physical back, becoming aware of one's own back, one's own background, the support one can get from having someone behind. There is space and time behind too.

Having a back, feeling it and leaning into it, can be like resting in a *Lehnstuhl*, an easy chair. It gives us space and breathing, then our body has volume, is three-dimensional and becomes our container.

Fields of Awareness

The experience of the participants in this research group was calmness, expanse and a space of awareness. I sensed the aliveness of the space and the more the space was filled with awareness, the more we began to be connected, a sharing of one field for which we all were responsible.

How to stay alive in interdependency and not shrink into dependency? This could be the next task.

We have an effect on each other and on our environment, through our being and our doing, and the environment has an effect on us too.

We resonate: this gives us a sense of what is present in ourselves and in the space.

It can be written down quickly – 'being in resonance' – but not quickly achieved.

It is a never-ending process, a refinement of awareness, of

consciousness, of sensing and feeling, also of understanding and distinguishing.

In a group, if we are in tune and one person changes their place or position or shifts their awareness, then we all need to change too; we respond, adapt, improvise; it is an ongoing process. Someone releases some stress, a tightness, lets go of a burden, and often the whole group will take a deep breath: the release is in the air. Everyone contributes, everyone's creation, expression and release, everyone's change makes a difference to the whole.

At my first encounter with Prapto's work I was amazed (I was just back from California and had learnt to be amazed) by the differences in participants' movement qualities and style; everyone moved in their own unique way, and at the same time there was something special in the air, a connecting atmosphere.

Something in common was in the space and between people moving, like a soft energy. I got interested, even though nothing very exciting seemed to happen.

Seeing them being supported in their own ways and still being connected, sharing the space, was just the opposite of what I had experienced in my family, but I did not think of it then.

Gerald Hüther, a German neurobiologist, says: we human beings have two longings: one is to be free and the other is to be *verbunden*. The dictionary offers me for *verbunden*: connected, related, etc. I add 'being a part of'.

Moving in a group can be like being part of one organism, with a heightened awareness. Sometimes it feels like being under a microscope.

Form and structure evolves from the contact and being in resonance with the living and organised organism.

Following the body and being connected with the living environment we enter the unpredictable nature of life, at times not understanding why we need to move like this, or in that direction, and at the same time being clear that this is what needs to happen, what needs to be done.

Having an intention or a task helps to start the movement practice, it gives a guideline for moving (and living): for being aware, witnessing oneself, growing the ability to respond, to be present and connected to the energy of life. It requires trust in the wisdom of the body and its knowledge. It is surprising, touching, cleansing, authentic, easy, somehow limitless, free and connected. We compose, we create, *wir gestalten* while we move/dance.

EMBODIED LIVES

Our physical presence, being rooted and grounded in the body, is our base, our home. The body is our instrument, this is where it happens, here we speak – nonverbally – here we receive the nonverbal. It is important to get to know and be present in the body otherwise there is no : body, and we are lost, in the world of fine energy, vibrations and resonances.

I was in Parangtritis, a village in Java on the Indian Ocean. I watched a group practising movement in the endless white dunes. Why did their range of movement and use of space get smaller and smaller and they themselves too? Was it the width of the environment and its constant change due to the wind and the currents in the sea?

Prapto shared his perception, predicting what movement activities would happen next. My mouth probably dropped open: how could he know? My memory is that he said something like: “*by their pattern of communication in action and reaction in movement they affect each other*”. They got stuck, almost completely motionless... He asked me to join the group without entering their communication system, without being absorbed and without using them, but helping to open the space again. I did not believe that this would be possible, but I did go in and worked on opening the space in movement; Prapto witnessed and prayed, and it was possible.

How did I do it? I do not remember. I have the image of a sticky spider’s web now and I think I did a cleaning job then, by being clear in my body and my movement.

I saw the documentary film *The Artist is Present* about performance artist Marina Abramovic. She is sitting in MOMA in New York, and is ‘just’ looking into the eyes of every person who comes to sit in front of her. Some are smiling; from some people’s eyes tears are flowing. The ‘audience’ around is with them. Being seen, being in contact, sitting with someone, present, just this, is so powerful. I left the cinema refreshed after a long day. I felt cleansed.

Just staying with what is.

“When I look, I am seen, so I exist,” says British psychoanalyst D.W. Winnicott (1967).

Presence makes the difference, in the art of movement/dance, of performance and the art of healing. Presence deepens the experience, it speaks, verbally sometimes, nonverbally always. Being seen, with an inner attitude of compassion, is an experience beyond any method or technique.

Further Development

At some point I realised that I needed something that I could not get in movement practice, or in meditation. I missed the transformation I was longing for.

I was searching for a method of therapy, for a person who would embody and be connected to at least some essentials I cherish in this movement work.

I ran away from many therapists in the first hour. Until one day when I knew already on the phone that this was it. I felt seen, taken seriously, acknowledged.

Somatic Experiencing (SE) is a resources-oriented and body-centred method of resolving trauma and stress. It is a practice of working with what is present, bringing past and future into the now, and helping to release the effects left in the body from traumatic experiences. It also provided theory, explanations and references that I needed personally and professionally.

In the Amerta practice I had become aware of my reactions; sometimes I went beyond them and moved free, free.

In SE I stayed with my 'reactions' and 'patterns', I felt them, got to know and understand my emotions, my helplessness and my pain, which I released bit by bit.

An SE session is usually a one-to-one situation and I needed someone who would stay with me for a whole hour and more. I needed someone holding the space, creating a safe container, taking my hand, literally. I needed words, and my own language for understanding my story in the context of German history.

Slowing down in movement often happens naturally, by practising refinement, and it often happens in nature. In trauma release work, we are invited to slow down the spontaneous movements and gestures that we often make while speaking, so we can feel every inch of the movement and the inherent feelings and emotions. It makes us aware of all the information our bodies hold. A little movement moment can reveal so much richness, excitement, weakness or important images. The slowing down helps us to find these moments which we tend to skip and jump over. And we are helped by someone who gently reminds us to stay present by asking: "If that is allowed: how does it feel in your body?" Allowing opens the space for us to land in the body.

When we get behind/beyond the judgements, explanations, reasonings, smart thoughts (of the prefrontal brain) and have the courage to feel (the limbic brain), acknowledge the instincts (brain stem), and allow this experience to just be and give time for release to happen, we come into the present and closer to ourselves.

The release seems to drop into every cell, we breathe, cry sometimes or laugh; we have space; a profound relaxation happens as well as a deep transformative process.

SE has deepened my practice in many ways. It gives me a clearer and deeper understanding of what is happening in the body, in movement and in resonance. It deepened my practice of acknowledging the truth and of acceptance.

Acceptance

Acceptance sounds great, but how do we do it? Often the word acceptance is in the realm of judgement itself, because accepting is good and rejecting is bad. What does it require to be able to accept? There are conditions when we cannot accept, not yet or not alone; we need help and sometimes we need a lot of time. “If you have all the time in the world: how does it feel in your body?”

There are ways that can help us find acceptance in movement practice, for instance working on adaptation to a new situation or to a changed physical ability – or working on measurements: how big is my step? how open are my arms? how bright is the light I can be in? – or giving space by relaxing, being thankful and lessening the fear, not letting the fear go, but moving step by step into more confidence; to name but a few. It is a process. Humour and creativity are wonderful ways too.

Accepting is happening; one cannot do it, but one can prepare for it.

Having spent many months in Java, where Prapto and this movement practice originate, I experienced a sensing and feeling culture, a flow of time, of music and traffic, smile and laughter, a grounded physical presence, an attitude of relaxing into what is and the presence of prayer and meditation which taught me a lot.

I am thankful for the free spirit of art of Anna Halprin, the deep and free spiritual connectedness and wisdom of Prapto and the free research mind of Peter Levine.

Blossoming

I have a garden. I find rest there; I stop, listen and see.

It reminds me that there is more than human activity. It is refreshing. I discover wonderful things, learn to understand the needs of plants and my own need to put my hands into the earth, see the sky and create beautiful breathing compositions.

I love to dance connecting to my wild side, to stillness and to the energy of life.

I enjoy teaching, guiding and witnessing growth and creation, development and the unfolding of potential – stimulating more aliveness in what we do, what we have and who we are.

I feel at home with going beyond rules and tools, with inner attitudes of space, compassion, passion and curiosity.

I call my work 'Blossoming'.

~ ~ ~

References

Winnicott D.W. (1967) 'The location of cultural experience', *International Journal of Psychoanalysis*, 48:368–372

Beate Stühm works as a freelance Movement/Dance teacher and artist and, since 2009, as a Somatic Experiencing Practitioner. She trained in Aikido; then graduated from Anna Halprin's San Francisco Dancers' Workshop (SFDW)/Tamalpa Institute. Beate practised intensively in Java at Padepokan Lemah Putih and in Europe with Prapto, 1987-1997; she is a Messenger Art teacher. In Java she also practised Sumarah Meditation and did Meditation Guidance Training with Laura Romano. She edited *Impressions*, a Sharing Movement Magazine (1995-2005), made video documentations 'moving movies' of movement works. She sings in a polyphonic choir and is training in Neuro-Affective Psychotherapy.

BeateStuehm@web.de

www.BeateStuehm.de

Also Available from Triarchy Press

Miranda Tufnell

A Widening Field ~ Miranda Tufnell & Chris Crickmay

Body Space Image ~ Miranda Tufnell & Chris Crickmay

When I Open My Eyes: dance health imagination ~ Miranda Tufnell

Linda Hartley

Embodied Spirit, Conscious Earth ~ Linda Hartley

Sandra Reeve: Ways of Being a Body

Body and Awareness ~ ed. Sandra Reeve

Nine Ways of Seeing a Body ~ Sandra Reeve

Body and Performance ~ ed. Sandra Reeve

Skinner Releasing Technique

Skinner Releasing Technique: A Movement and Dance Practice ~ Manny Emslie

Alexander Technique

Before the Curtain Opens: Alexander Technique in the Actor's Life ~ Kate Kelly

Amerta Movement

The Roots of Amerta Movement ~ Lise Lavelle

Embodied Lives ~ ed. Katya Bloom, Margit Galanter & Sandra Reeve

Somatics and Ecosomatics

Rock Songs: story about walk about story about walkabout story ~ Nick Sales

Suomenlinna | Gropius: Two Contemplations on Body, Movement and

Intermateriality ~ Paula Kramer

Attending to Movement ~ ed. Sarah Whatley, Natalie Garrett Brown &

Kirsty Alexander

Nature Connection ~ Margaret Kerr and Jana Lemke

www.triarchypress.net/movement